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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

During the weekend, all major media underscored reported threats from the far Right to thwart the disengagement plan. Over the weekend, leading media reported that Likud cabinet ministers and Knesset members, including Shaul Mofaz and Meir Sheetrit, have received threats on their lives. Maariv reported the increasing danger that extremists could try to hit the mosques on the Temple Mount from the air. Ha'aretz reported that although the Justice Ministry would approve requests for the detention of extremists, the Shin Bet says there is not enough intelligence for such moves and that "at this stage," there will not be any change in the security deployment protecting ministers. Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra was quoted as saying in an interview with Jerusalem Post: "There are dangerous people out there who need to be arrested today." For its part, Hatzofe bannered a claim by the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories that Sharon is inciting against settlers.

All media reported that a ministerial committee on Sunday approved the release of 500 Palestinians prisoners and administrative detainees in keeping with a promise Israel gave the PA before the Sharm el-Sheikh summit. All prisoners, 170 of whom belong to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, will walk free by the end of the week or the beginning of the week. All media reported that Jericho will be handed over to Palestinian security forces as early as Tuesday. Yediot reported that the casino in the city, which was popular among Israelis following the Oslo accords, is expected to reopen soon. During the weekend, the media quoted Israeli and Palestinian officials as saying that Israel will allow 56 deported Palestinians to return to the West Bank.

All media reported that on Sunday, the Knesset's Constitution, Justice and Law Committee approved, 9-7, the part of the "evacuation-compensation" bill setting penalties for those who would disrupt the evacuation of territories. The Knesset will vote on the second and third readings of the entire bill on Wednesday; next Sunday, February 20, the cabinet will vote on a practical decision to evacuate settlements, which will start a 5-month countdown to the actual start of the evacuation. All media reported that following a meeting between Vice Premier Shimon Peres and the Shas party's spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef on Sunday, the Shas leaders reiterated their opposition to disengagement.

On Sunday, Jerusalem Post and Yediot cited a State Department announcement that the new U.S. Middle East security envoy, Lt. Gen. William Ward, will make his first trip to the region in his new job before the end of the month.

On Sunday, Jerusalem Post and other media reported that PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) secured Hamas's "de facto" acceptance of the truce with Israel. On Monday, Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli defense sources as saying Sunday that Hamas is using the lull in Israel's offensive actions to stock up on Qassam rockets, mines, and mortar shells in the Gaza Strip.

Jerusalem Post cited "assessments that reached Jerusalem," according to which alongside PA reform issues and preparations ahead of the IDF's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, political issues will also be

addressed at a luncheon hosted by British PM Tony Blair on March 1.

Israel Radio reported that this morning in Hebron Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian who tried to stab an IDF soldier.

Jerusalem Post quoted unnamed sources as saying that National Infrastructure Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer and PM Sharon have discussed acquiring natural gas from the PA in exchange for water and electricity services.

Globes cited the belief of "Washington sources close to Middle East policy" as saying that the U.S. will soon cancel its official warning against traveling to Israel, and perhaps also against traveling to the PA. The sources said that the significant drop in terrorist attacks within the Green Line and in the West Bank was the decisive factor in a possible cancellation of the warning. Another motive is the desire of the Bush administration to express its satisfaction at the measures taken by Israel and the Palestinians to implement the disengagement plan.

Globes cited New York Times that the FBI is initiating recruitment of Israelis and other foreigners residing in the U.S., including business people, to spy abroad. Globes says that the CIA does not particularly like the idea.

On Sunday, Yediot cited concerns in Israel that Russia will launch two Iranian spy satellites that will cover Israel and other countries.

Ha'aretz reported that registration in the U.S. for the upcoming seasons of Palestine Summer Encounter (PSE) is at its height. The newspaper cited the organizers' hope that after a successful season last year, dozens of American students will "forge strategic partnerships to strengthen communities in the region" through living and studying in the Bethlehem area.

All media reported that two days of violent clashes between Druze and Christian residents of the Galilee village of Maghar, on Friday and Saturday, resulted in seven injuries and caused many Christian families to flee the village. The police and the media said the clashes constituted an anti-Christian "pogrom."

On Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that Israeli diplomacy has enlisted Lavan Mercer, a former U.S. basketball player who became a star with the Maccabi Tel Aviv team, converted to Judaism and served in the IDF, for its PR efforts in the southern U.S. states.

During the weekend, the media extensively reported on the death Friday of noted Jewish-American playwright Arthur Miller.

Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Israel's foreign policy should not be damaged by someone [i.e. Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom] trying to have his cake and eat it, too."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Anti-disengagement leaders -- particularly religious figures -- need to banish those who stray in the direction of incitement and violence."

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The next [political] assassin moves stealthily among us day after day, anonymous, silent and dangerous. He knows that no one will catch him. He waits for the proper moment. Soon. Soon."

Block Quotes:

I. "Shalom's Choice"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (February 14): "While [Foreign Minister Silvan] Shalom is not part of the 'putsch' nor counted with the Likud rebels, practically speaking his behavior is undermining the Prime Minister's policies and challenging the legitimacy of the disengagement process that Sharon is leading. But it is much worse than that, because Shalom is responsible for explaining the

disengagement plan to the world and persuading the world of its legitimacy and chances for its implementation.... There will not be a referendum because the Knesset and government have already decided on disengagement, because the Prime Minister has stuck to his position, and because the plan is on course and there is no way back without causing damage to the country, and Shalom knows this. If building his political strength in the party is so important to him that he is prepared to support a lost cause, just so that he will be remembered for it, he should leave the government and devote his private time to the issue. Israel's foreign policy should not be damaged by someone trying to have his cake and eat it, too."

II. "Banish Fanatics"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (February 14): "While threats and vandalism can be traced to a minuscule number of disengagement opponents, they must not be ignored. The level of incitement, the degree of demonization Sharon has been subjected to ('Stalin,' 'dictator'), the orchestration of refusal to serve, the escalating level of violence--on Friday, near Itamar [in the West Bank], an IDF officer was almost run over by settlers -- all point to a problem that may not be limited to a small number of apocalyptic fanatics. Today's toxic political environment should not be attributed to the anti-disengagement forces alone. It comes in the wake of four years of relentless Palestinian terrorism that claimed 1,000 Israeli lives -- a price disproportionately paid by the settlers -- and a political about-face by Sharon, who essentially embraced key positions of Amram Mitzna, the opponent he trounced at the polls in January 2003. Moreover, whether you support or oppose disengagement, there is an argument to be made that Sharon has bulldozed rather than finessed its implementation. But what we're dealing with here is not a political argument. Indeed, what must first be done is to distinguish between legitimate political concerns and opposition, on the one hand, and gangsterism, on the other. Those who employ violence, intimidation and incitement must be identified, isolated and prosecuted.... Unfortunately, it is too late for words alone. Anti-disengagement leaders -- particularly religious figures -- need to banish those who stray in the direction of incitement and violence. And synagogues and communities should shun such persons.... The actions of the government and the Knesset may be regarded as imprudent, self-serving or misguided. They are not 'crimes against humanity.'"

III. "The Next Assassin"

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 14): "The next [political] assassin knows that he will be a hero.... The next assassin knows that he is not the only one. True, he has worked alone so far, and on the right day will also do the correct and sacred and awful thing on his own, without sharing it with a single soul. But he knows deep in his heart that he is not wrong, and there are others like him. He reads in the newspapers and hears conversations about the fears of all kinds of murderous violence: mass murder of Arabs, attacking the Temple Mount mosques, the murder of army and police officers. He not only hopes, he knows for a certainty that there are others like him, more than a few, who are thinking and planning carefully, and on the day of reckoning they will carry out all this and more. No, he is not alone.... He lives among us and does not stand out in any way. His speech is moderate, his reactions are not vehement. When someone tries to elicit an extreme statement from him, he shrugs and remains silent. He steers clear of crowds, and is careful to stay away from places where people stand and rage, waving signs and cursing. No one can photograph him waving his fist or distorting his face in hateful cries. He says nothing, shouts nothing, writes nothing. He will only act. The next assassin moves stealthily among us day after day, anonymous, silent and dangerous. He knows that no one will catch him. He waits for the proper moment. Soon. Soon."

KURTZER